

In 1900, amongst the 170,000 new immigrants to the Northwest Territories (included northern Alberta at the time), came an average Ukrainian family of eight people. A simple Ukrainian cantor and farmer (he actually recorded his occupation as a day laborer on the ship manifest), Kyrilo (Cyril) Paranicz and his wife Julia (Dunajewski) Paranicz, had decided to immigrate to Canada, instead of Brazil. The reports had been favorable and they were no doubt excited about the prospects of a new life and freedom for their children.



They must have heard the terrible stories of Brazil; about the frustration and in some cases the death and disease that existed there at the time. They would have heard about the hardship facing other settlers when they tried to colonize the Amazon. Some settlers had actually been in such dire straits they had bartered away their children rather than see them suffer the degrading conditions!

They probably would have read much from Dr. Oleskow's reports of Canada and a place called the Northwest Territories, which were available at the time. They talked about the fertile land and the colonies already in place there; Dr. Oleskow warned about being prepared for hardship but seemed assured these hardships would not endure. They also had friends there, as well, in some place called Beaver Lake (later called Beaver Hill Lake). They would go to Canada and stay with Mr. Ruzicki, a man who was already established and who came from the village they now lived in, Biala, Chortkiv.

Stories mention that they had just had twins and that sadly they had lost the sister to their little baby son, Zenon (Zenowy or Sam), before they made the journey. We are unable to document this. Cyril had fashioned a cradle by hand that folded up and could be strung from the ceiling in the boat so the baby would be comfortable.

(Ed. Note: This cradle now hangs in the museum at St. John's Cathedral in Edmonton. Made from solid strips of oak, it is quite small).

They packed up their belongings and some tools to be transported for the journey. The trip would take some time, for first they had to make their way to Hamburg, Germany to board a ship. From a wagon, to the train, over the Austrian Alps and then to a ship to cross the Atlantic Ocean, they must have been filled with many mixed emotions.

They would, no doubt, miss their little cottage and garden in the village (family stories speak of a small orchard with pear, cherry and plum trees) that they were so accustomed to. They would miss their friends and relatives, as well. They would remember them and tell their children and grandchildren of the Ukraine. They would carry their customs, their religion and their language with them in their hearts to this new land.

Though money and land was scarce amongst the peasants of Chortkiv at the time, stories tell us that Cyril had owned 28 morgs of land. The average land holding for an immigrant before they came to Canada was 5-6 morgs. (There are 113 morgs of land to 160 acres). Custom was at the time to divide your land holdings between your male heirs and Cyril

had 6 of them. If he had followed the custom, his children would have been very poorly off. This could have been one of the motivating factors that spurred his move to Canada. Many immigrants arrived with little or no money and whatever money Cyril had saved or accumulated from the sale of his land went towards the move. It is said in family stories that he left with \$2000. They had been told that when they arrived to their destination that they would only have to pick out the land they wanted and pay a small registration fee of \$10 and they would be given 113 morgs (160 acres) of land! This must have seemed incredulous to them but letters from other settlers and Dr. Oleskow assured them that the stories were true.

However he came upon his money, Cyril had managed to accumulate enough to pay the steamship ticket and railroad costs to transport his family and belongings to Canada. The fare for the boat would have been approximately \$640 for the entire family. This would not have included the food required to feed them all. There is a family story that mentions having to smuggle his son, John, aboard the boat so that he could avoid the conscription to the army that was required of young men. The age of conscription was 25 and John was 21 at the time he left the Ukraine. He is shown under his name, with his age, as traveling with the family on the steamship manifest. Though John may have felt great relief that he did not have to serve in an effort that took so many of his friends away never to return, it is doubtful that they actually had to smuggle him out.

As well as their eldest John (21) and their youngest Zenon (5 months) they had their other sons to consider. Their second eldest Clenus (Klem) was ten; their third son Athomy (Anton) was nine; the fourth Wlodimyr (Lodic, Walter) was four; and finally their small toddler Eugenic (Eugene) was two. There would be opportunities in Canada for all of them. It would not be easy and there was much work to do when they reached Beaver Lake, but the promise of free land from the immigration agents was very enticing. And so, wary and a little worried, with Austrian passports in hand, they left for Canada.

The train ride to Hamburg was a slow and tedious one in those days and must have been quite the challenge with 5 smaller children to contend with. Food was limited to whatever Julia would have prepared packed prior to leaving. It would have taken a few days to reach the port and they would travel through what was then called Eastern Galicia, through parts of Austria and Germany and on into the port city of Hamburg. Hamburg was the busiest port for emigration from Europe in the 1900's.

The docks were very large and long and the ships were huge. There was a flurry of organization and activity that must have been scary for such unworldly people. There were these huge towering ships being loaded with goods and provisions for the voyage. Cargo, belongings and people scattered everywhere. And the noise. Always there was the noise. This was the activity that consumed Hamburg in 1900. Everywhere you looked there were people and such a variety of languages and appearances. Most would go to America; a portion would stop in Canada.

After unloading the cargo they had brought and locating the ship they were to depart on, the SS Assyria, Cyril and Julia gathered their children, their belongings, and their nerves

and proceeded up the gangway to the ships purser, who recorded their names upon the ships manifest for the immigration people at the receiving end of the trip.

The Assyria was built in 1898 for the Hamburg Amerika Line, the same line which would later build the Titanic. She was a 6581 gross ton ship that was 420.7 ft in length and 54.4

ft across and was powered with two sailing masts and one funnel that exhausted the steam driven single screw propeller.

She had a top speed of



thirteen knots and had fifty first class accommodations and room in the steerage section for 1200 third class passengers. Her last voyage on the Hamburg Amerika Line was December 11, 1904. She was then sold to the Russian Volunteer Fleet and renamed the "Sveaborg". She was scrapped in 1928 and I have been unable to locate either a painting, drawing, or photograph of her. I have however included the above picture of her sister ship the S.S Caportegal, built the same year from the same plans and also owned by Hamburg Amerika.

Ukrainian is a Cyrillic language and is difficult to translate to English, so no doubt Cyril told the ships purser to spell it the way Cyril's father Lucas, and his father before him, Kossanko, had. Still looking at their name in another language must have been strange to them...Paranicz. The name would later evolve in the new country into three different variations. This is the spelling that is found in his citizenship papers as well as his baptism certificate.

They boarded the SS Assyria on June 19, 1900 and traveled as a complete family unit on steamship ticket A1900-0210 from the Hamburg-America Steamship Company. They were the only family on board the boat that carried the family name to the new world.

A little aside here: there is a story that is a common myth heard by many genealogists, amongst families seeking answers to the other groups that have the same name. It goes something like this: "There must have been a brother or two that came with them and they had a parting of the ways." In this case, that is simply not true. The ship manifest reveals that they traveled alone. There may have been other family members that entered Canada or the United States either before or since they immigrated but we are unable to confirm that this is so.

There was a Paranicz that passed through Ellis Island in the United States in 1923 but if she married she would have taken another name.

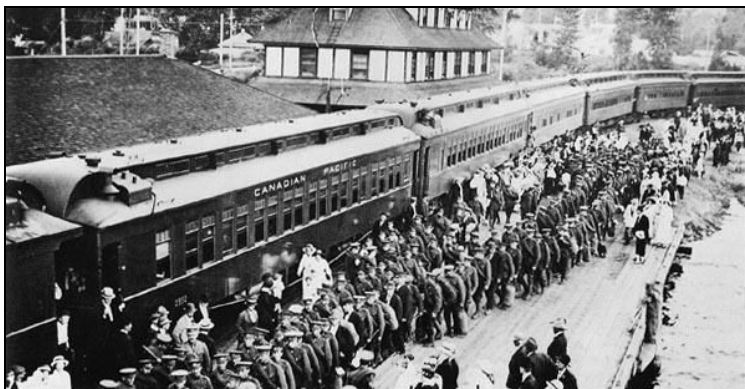
Back to our story: They were traveling a steamship class called steerage according to their ticket. These were the peasant quarters in the lower portions of the ship. The more expensive cabins in the upper decks were reserved for those that could afford the extravagant fares and luxurious dining facilities. Food was available, to the lower class, in canteens that dispensed basic foodstuffs, though the prices were very high. Many people would prepare their own meals on the stoves provided in the dormitory style rooms that housed many families at once, and Julia would have had to do the same. They were to share the same bathroom facilities with many other families and the lighting was dim. Bathing was almost non-existent.

There were no portholes and very little ventilation as these decks were most times at or below the resting water level of the ship. The ships in those days were not equipped with stabilizers and they would have rocked constantly; in a storm they rocked violently.

Illness and seasickness were not uncommon and the lower decks were kept locked in the evenings, as the crews feared the peasants were predisposed to criminal or violent behavior. At times the odors were unbearable and reports have been made of crew members who ventured into the steerage section and became overwhelmed with violent nausea almost immediately. During the day, the commoners were allowed onto the main decks for fresh air and exercise, but the upper decks were off limits to them and reserved for cabin passengers.

Despite all the seasickness and home remedies that did not work (doctors were not made available to the lower classes); the voyage must have been high adventure for the children from the small poverty-ridden villages. The vast enormity of the ship alone must have been exciting and in the dormitories there was little work or chores to do and many other children to play with. The men spent their time, when they were not ill, playing cards and smoking and generally discussing their plans for the new world. The women would spend their time tending the ill and cleaning as best they could while the children played and ran amongst all the chaos.

They traveled the direct route to Canada, as shown on their ticket. The voyage took approximately nine days (exact arrival date as yet unconfirmed). By the time most immigrants emerged from the steerage decks in Halifax, they were grateful that the worse was over. They were usually greeted by an immigration agent and they presented a very sorry excuse for a human being, as most agents recorded. The majority were desperately in need of a bath and in some cases, medical attention. Their lack of understanding of the English language did nothing to assist the problem.



Then, there were the con artists that preyed upon their naïveté and the crime that occurred amongst the general pandemonium of the Halifax docks. Many people were

cheated out of what little money they had left. Cyril and Julia seemed to escape this experience and once again gathering up their brood and belongings, gathered some more provisions and under the guidance of the immigration agents made their way to the C.P.R. station. There they boarded the train and prepared to endure the approximate week long journey by train from Halifax, through Toronto and onto Winnipeg. From there the train would take them to Calgary and then up to the Town of Strathscona across the river from Edmonton, in the Northwest Territories.

The immigration cars used by the C. P. R. in those days were little more than what we would deem a cattle car today. They had wooden benches and a communal bathroom in one corner. The people crowded into the cars; their belongings were loaded into a freight car, with the exception of personal luggage and the food they had brought for the trip. The ventilation was better and the windows were opened frequently. They were certainly not as crowded as the steerage decks. As uncomfortable as these cars were, they must have been a huge relief from the dimly lit, smelly quarters on the ship.

The country must have seemed to stretch on forever and by now the realization of what they had undertaken must have started to make an impression on them. Never would they return to the Ukraine; a letter would take seventeen days to mail from where they were going. This was a grueling and challenging time for all but I suspect it was particularly bad amongst the women who were charged with caring for the children and preparing the meals. There was a coal stove in the center of the car to provide heat and a cooking facility for the women.

Some people might have been familiar from the ship; but there were also others from many other ships. People could move from car to car and you could stand outside on the decking at the end of each car and watch the countryside slip away.



The nights of late spring and early summer brought the chilled air into the cars as they moved west toward the Rocky Mountains along the rails of steel and the benches and floors of the train were not the comfortable beds they knew back in the Ukraine. The heaters did little to provide warmth for those unfortunate enough to be at the ends of the train cars. The children slept closest to the heater and the adults huddled together for warmth. The slow moving trains of those days lurked and strained under the weight of their human cargo and seemed never to stop except to drop mail and bring on coal and water for the engine. Many would leave the train in Winnipeg or Regina and there was more room.

One can imagine the train moving through the prairie on a warm day, the windows open, the sun heating the car to a comfortable temperature. The children still found time to play together. Some children were even born on these trains. The first true Canadians of

Ukrainian descent. As long as this journey was, there must have been a sense that it was almost over and the excitement built as they approached the end of the trail in Strathscona.

As the train stopped at Strathscona station, many tired immigrants stepped off the train. There the immigration agents arranged temporary accommodations for the people and assisted those that needed their help. It is unknown if Cyril and Julia met Mr. Ruzicki as they stepped off the train or if they had to wait a few days for him to arrive. As a matter of record, had they waited they would no doubt have stayed in one of the many “immigration shacks” erected on C.P.R. land. After loading up the wagon it would have taken a very long day’s journey by wagon to reach the Ruzicki homestead at Beaver Lake.

The Ruzicki homestead was a stopping point for many newcomers and the small home, by one account, once had 32 people staying there at one time. It provided the children a place to once again run and play and gave Cyril and Julia an opportunity to rest after their harrowing voyage. For the first time in almost three weeks everyone had the chance to enjoy a decent meal and a comfortable bed. After a suitable rest and time to select a homestead, Mr. Ruzicki took Cyril to Edmonton to see the land Agent and on July 25, 1900, Cyril purchased his quarter of land for the registration fee of \$10. John, his son, saw this as an opportunity as well, much to the chagrin of Cyril. He would purchase his land four days later. (See attached documents)

There is another family story that states the family had \$300 when they disembarked the train in Strathscona. This may well be true, but this money was not to last very long. The homestead documents recorded the fact that Cyril purchased three horses and two cows that summer. He also bought a plow but they since they had filed for a homestead on July



25, 1900, it was much too late to plant a crop. He would need food and shelter for the winter and another story relates him purchasing eight bags of flour. He would have needed straw and hay for the animals to survive the harsh Canadian winter.

They dug out a shelter into the side of hill on their land and boarded up the front. These buildings were not uncommon amongst the immigrating Ukrainian people and resembled a root cellar. These were known as *burdieo*’s.

Most had a log frontage and a small stove for heat and cooking. The front door was not usually over four feet high. The picture on the left is a typical *burdieo*.

As it was completed, it must have occurred to both Cyril and Julia, that they had done it. They had uprooted their family from Biala, Chortkiv in the Ukraine to half way around the world to this strange, unusual country of Canada and a little Ukrainian settlement in Beaver Lake called Royal Park. They would survive the harsh winter on wild game, flour

and potatoes. In the spring, with the help of their son John, they would begin building their house. But that is another story.....

Marvin Paranych